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HIMALAYAN LANDSCAPES

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Abstract: Landscape painting is a sort of magic in which one creates a whole world on a two dimensional plane. It is a form of art which uses elements of Nature as primary subject. Landscape painting was unknown in the ancient world. Earlier it was only used as background. Human's inherent admiration of natural beauty is the driving force behind the creation of landscapes. Himachal Pradesh is full of rich culture, heritage and natural beauty. Situated in the lap of Himalayas, this land offers a lot especially to the artists. With the passage of time, rapid construction and development is taking place and landscapes of Himachal Pradesh are changing. For example, old Mud houses are now being replaced by cemented houses. From the point of view of preserving rich cultural heritage and appreciating what nature is offering us, Landscapes becomes an important form of art to be studied.

Landscapes by Artist A.R.Gautam are best examples of purely Himalayan Artworks. Artist developed his unique visual language to represent the beauties of Natural world around him.

PROPOSED RESEARCH AREA

This Paper gives information about Landscape paintings painted by A.R.Gautam. Brief account of History of Landscape is discussed. Biography of Artist is studied as Art works are inspired by the Experience and Surrounding in which Artist grew up. Style, Theme, Method and Material are discussed. Main concern is to study the landscapes with respect to the regional values and essence of Himachal Pradesh.

Index terms- A.R.Gautam, Himachal Pradesh, Himalayan Landscape, Landscape, Nature

I. Introduction

Landscape painting is an Art of creating a whole world on a two dimensional plane. Elements of nature are used to create a composition. Primary subjects are river, mountains, trees, valleys and forests etc. rather than human forms. Most interesting fact is even sky is considered an important subject in landscape painting which is otherwise considered as background. Essence of landscape painting lies in how perfectly an artist has observed and depicted the mood of nature. Human's inherent admiration of beauty of nature is the driving force behind the creation of landscape. As Aristotle quotes "Art takes nature as its model". Perspective, Balance, Composition, Harmony and Colours are important factors while depicting Landscapes.

Meaning and origin: The Term “Landscape” has its origin in the Dutch word “Landschap” which means a patch of ground and denoted any picture whose main subject is the depiction of a scenic view in early 1500s. Until this time period, landscapes were included in purely as a setting for human activity. Though there are no traces of landscape painting as an independent genre before Renaissance Period, we can look back to ancient times to see the traces of how elements of Nature were used. But before starting with the history of landscapes in western art, **Chinese Painting** has something to offer. In 6th Century Shan Shui- a form of landscape painting inspired by Taoism was prevalent. It was done with ink and brush. Main idea behind this style is Humans and Animals must live in balance with the Nature. Depiction of nature is considered Sacred in Chinese art.

When there was no knowledge of Landscape Painting, Landscapes were still there. Elements of Nature were an inspiration for Human Beings from the very early times. Going Back to **Egyptian Times** flowering plants and vegetation could be seen. Egyptians were more interested in Human and Animal Form and less delicacy is practiced with Natural themes. **Assyrians** also used trees and Vegetation in their art works as seen on vase reliefs. As compared to Egyptians, Assyrians handled these elements with little more delicacy. **Greeks** and **Romans** took interest in creating a whole scape. Romans took Natural settings in depicting few religious works but these scenes are highly crowded and well ornamented with decorative elements. During the course of Roman Empire New Religion, Christianity was born. Now artists started showing Christian themes with little inclusion of natural setting in the foreground. In a very simple visual language, trees, grass and birds were painted. **Gothic** art could be considered as the first style in which Landscape as a clear background was painted by the Artists. Giotto’s “Lamentation” (**Fig.1**) and Duccio’s “Kiss of Judas” (**Fig.2**) are best examples.



Figure.1, Lamentation, Giotto, Fresco, 1304-06

Figure.2, Kiss of Judas, Duccio, Tempra on Wood, 1308-11

Renaissance came up with Mathematical advancements in perspective which is an important aspect in Landscape and added a lot to Art of Landscape Painting. Though, in most of the Historical and Religious paintings landscapes were made as background in Renaissance, for example, “Mona Lisa” (**Fig.3**) by Leonardo da Vinci. Few works celebrating Scenery could be seen. Consider the Albrecht Altdorfer’s “Landscape with Footbridge” in **Fig.4**. This is an earliest example of pure landscape painting. Thus, in 16th century Landscape was considered as an Independent genre.



Fig.3, Mona Lisa, Leonardo da Vinci, oil on wood, 1503

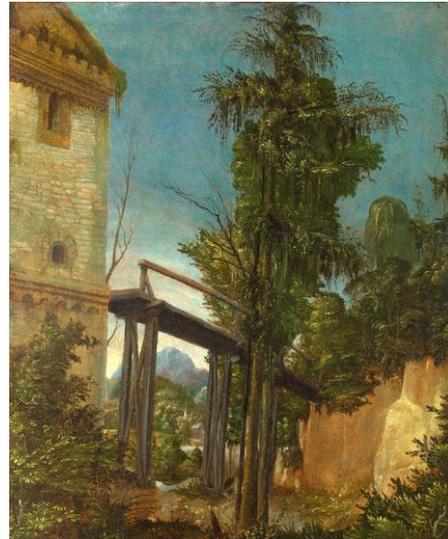


Fig.4, Landscape with Footbridge, Albrecht Altdorfer, oil on wood, 1517-1520

Romanticism in 18th century made remarkable additions to Landscape Painting after Renaissance. Landscapes now got prominence as Expression of Emotions. Landscapes were depicted in different ways.. Picturesque in which unspoiled nature is shown without any disturbance from human side, Pastoral as painted by John Constable which shows our dominion over Nature. For example “The Hay Wain” by John Constable (**Fig.5**) And last but not the least Sublime. Divine quality of nature is depicted.



Figure.5, The Hay Wain, John Constable Oil on Canvas, 1821

In France in 1820s, Realism's **Barbizon School** came up with major contribution in Landscape Painting. Artists with common interest started meeting at the Barbizon village, 50 miles from Paris and started working in Fontainebleau Jungles. Pioneers were Theodore Rousseau and Jean Francois Millet. Gustav Courbet also worked here. Nature is painted as it is by the artists. Sometimes, Landscapes were made with setting of human activities.

In the late 19th century, **Impressionism** introduced the concept of plain air painting. Now landscapes are no longer confined to studios. Artists paint at any moment of inspiration. They do not focus on every single detail, rather focused on capturing the energy, light, colour and shadows. Contributions of Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Paul Cezanne and Van Gogh are adorable in the field of landscape painting.

An urban approach to landscape painting is very vast. Now landscape painting is not only confined to painting on paper but also installation and street art inspired by Nature. **Land Art** is in lime light today.

History of Landscapes in India is stretched from 11th to 19th century. The basic elements of Nature could be seen in Indian Art from the times of Manuscript Painting. **Jain Manuscript** Kalpasutra that deals with lives of 24 Jain Tirthankaras made in Patan, Gujrat. This work is followed by an illustrated version of Kalakacarya-katha. This is story of Kalaka, a Jain teacher. Some stylised trees, vegetation and clouds are visible here. **Mughal School** of Miniature Paining, 16th -19th century shows remarkable work done in Landscapes but it must be noted that landscape as an independent genre was not established till that time.

Landscapes were used as supporting or background element only. Miniatures dating back to the time of Akbar and Jahangir could be taken as examples of compositions with landscape backgrounds.

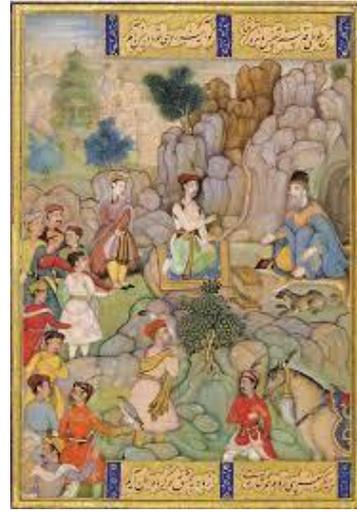
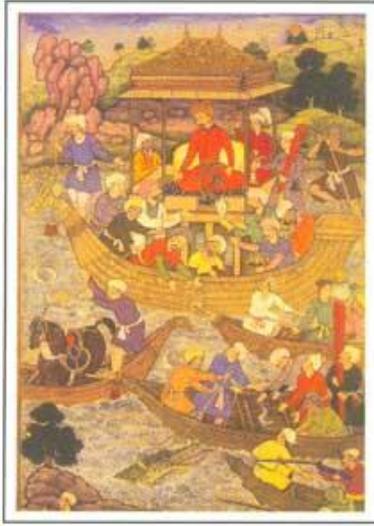


Figure.6, Babur Crossing the river sone, National Museum, New Delhi

Figure.7, A Prince and a Hermit, Aga Khan Museum, Canada

In the **Fig.6 and Fig.7** Landscape with low hills, type of trees and variation in sky is clearly visible. Delicacy is practiced with the forms of nature. Celebration of Landscape with human forms is well maintained. In **Rajasthani School** of Miniature Painting (1550-1900 CE), Landscapes were less realistic than Mughal School. Miniatures from Kota region of Rajasthan are adorable as hunting themes with forests setting and lush beauty clearly displays the emergence of Landscapes as an important part of composition. **Pahari School** of Miniature Painting (1700-1900 CE) flourished in the foothills of Punjab, Garhwal and Jammu. Abandoning the imitation of the weakened Mughal Style and inspired by the indigenous beauty of Pharai land, artists created lyrical compositions with minute details, soft touch and spontaneity. Landscapes as background in Pahari Miniature are most beautiful of all other Miniature schools. One of the reasons was artist's love for his surroundings. Pahari regions being full of beautiful landscapes and variety of flora and fauna influenced the forms of nature in the compositions of Pahari Miniature Artists.

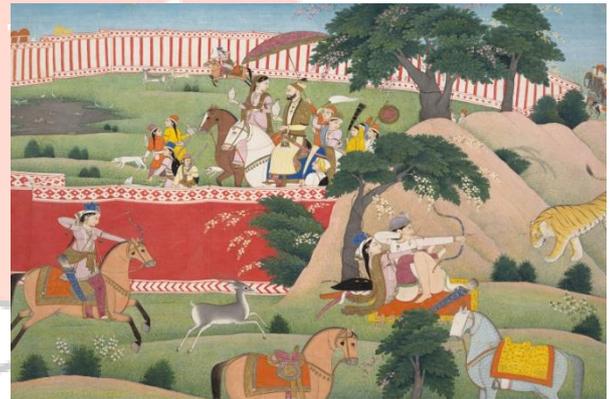


Figure.8, Pleasure of the Hunt, Kangra, c.1800, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

European artists like Daniell Brothers, William Hodges, Robert Grind lay and Edward Cheney visited India and painted the Landscapes of India with the purpose of Documentation so that they can introduce Indian Landscapes to the west.

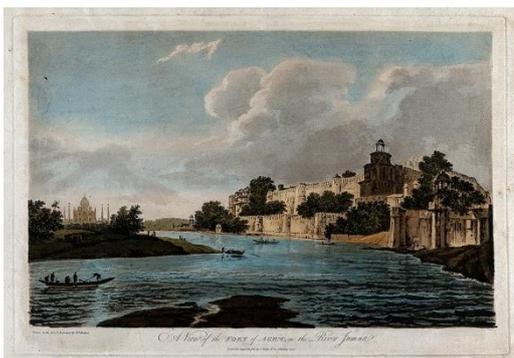


Figure.9, view of the Fort of Agra,

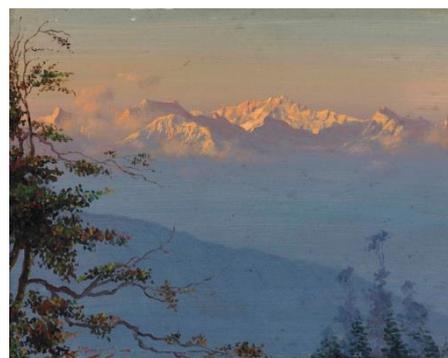


Figure.10, Himalayan Landscape, Oil on canvas

This trend of documentation inspired Indian Artists like Raja Ravi Verma and J.P Gangooly to paint Indian Landscapes in a realistic manner. **Figure. 10** is a Himalayan Landscape J.P. Gangooly. Between 19th to 20th century artists learned realistic style of painting from Europeans. They assimilated the style during this period.

A huge change came in 1950s- 1960s when these European style of realistic landscapes were rejected. Instead, Japanese 'wash' paintings were appreciated. **Bengal Wash technique** used layered pigments with water. School played an important role here. They practiced and promoted this style in Santiniketan and experimented with Expressionist style.

By 1970s **Contemporary Landscapes** came up with Abstraction in forms. Ram Kumar, Paramjit Singh, Akbar Padamasee, Satish Chandra, Avinash Chandra, Gopal Ghose along with other artists changed the Horizon of Indian Landscape Painting. **Figure.11** is a landscape by Ram Kumar. Nicholas Roerich Devyani Krishna and Kanwal Krishna made modern Himalayan Landscapes.



Figure.11, Beneras Ghat, Ram Kumar, Oil on Canvas

Landscapes of Himachal Pradesh are shaped by the natural climatic conditions, Flora and Fauna of the region. Snow clad ranges as Dhauladhar, Spiti Valley and Dalhousie; Lakes as Kajjiar, Manimahesh and Parasher are always the centre of attraction to the artists.

Achhru Ram Gautam is one of the senior artists of Himachal Pradesh, with an impressive list of achievements and recognitions attached to his name. He is an artist, sculptor, architect, draughtsman, and fluteplayer. He is best known for his Himalayan Landscapes including: Old mandi town, Gulaba Forest, On the way to Udaipur, and Old Chamba etc. Over the decades, his practice has maintained the commitment to represent nature in its various forms. A large part of charm lies in his application of oil colours over self-prepared surface using sawdust on ply wood.

Gautam was born on 26 August, 1938 in district Mandi of Himachal Pradesh. His mother Smt. Sarni Devi died when he was only two years old. At the age of six, father Sh. Ruldu Ram Gautam also passed away and the little boy was left alone. He was taken to his maternal grandmother's home at Rewalsar, Mandi. During his school days, a boy with no means went to school bare footed and used to draw on large rocks on his way to school. When villagers started appreciating his drawings, he got an early inspiration to draw and sketch. Upto 8th standard, he studied there and after that came to Mandi town.. As a truly religious and spiritual soul, he started meditation and appreciating virtues of the Supreme Power from childhood. He made the very first sculpture of Lord Shiva when he was in 10th standard. In 1955, he passed his matriculation from Panjab University. He then applied for admission in ITI Mandi for draughtsmanship. The selection criteria required drawing as a compulsory subject in school, that he never had. Due to lack of means, he never had used colours till that time. During interview when asked for portfolio by jury, Gautam told that he used to draw on large rocks and for admission purpose if they could provide him material, he could show his skills. He was given a still life including book, bottle and fruit. He sketched that so well that jury got amazed and selected him irrespective of the admission criteria. He completed his two-year diploma in draughtsmanship in 1957 and joined as draughtsman in Himachal Electricity Board in 1958. He got retired as Assistant Engineer from Larji Hydro Project, Mandi in 1996. Gautam learned painting for five years from 1958 to 1963 through 'Guru Parampara' from well-known court painter under Maharaja of Mandi, late Sh. Jawala Prasad Sharma. He also worked under Pandit Bhiwani Dutt. He first made his self-portrait. Till date, he has made many portraits of famous personalities. Five portrait painting of Sikh Gurus hangs on the walls of Mandi Gurudwara. During his job years, he was transferred to many places including Dalhousie, Chama, Shimla, Palampur, Lahol and Kilong. He got an opportunity to explore beautiful landscapes of Himachal Pradesh. He exhibited his art piece for the first time in Gaiety Theatre, Shimla, along with other famous

personalities including Sanat Chatterjee. During his posting in Shimla, he painted some of his master pieces including Hadimba temple, Shashur Gompa and few more. In 1986, the painting named Shashur Gompa, Keylong Lauhal Spiti was admired and purchased by the then Hon'ble Governor of Himachal Pradesh, Sh. Amin ud din Ahmed and further he had presented the same to the President of India, Dr. Sanjeeva Reddy which may be available at the President House, Delhi. His painting Hadimba Temple is displayed in Arts College, Shimla. In 1971, he made another masterpiece titled as, 'Cruelty on Bangla Mother'. This work was handed over to the then Prime Minister of India, Late Smt. Indira Gandhi in the presence of the then Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Late Sh. Ram Lal and the amount of painting was donated to the Bangla fund. The painting may be available at Trimurti bhavan, Delhi. He joined the trade union and in 1970, painted 'CM meri pyaari kursi' for which he went behind the bars for 19 days. A.R. Gautam believed that the artist should be concerned about the happenings around him and should contribute something positive for the society. One must not be afraid of hard work and should follow the path of deep commitment towards his sole purpose. Other than political and social themes, he got mastery over site paintings and used to sketch a lot. His working sphere includes political and social themes, Nature inspired, Portraiture and caricatures, but he is known mostly for landscapes and political theme-based paintings. He did many site paintings, including temple Panchvactar, Victoria bridge etc. According to him, "Sketching is fundamental to Art."

II. Studying the Landscape of Himachal Pradesh with reference to the works of A.R. Gautam:



Figure 12, An Evening in Kilong, Oil on Plywood, 1976

A.R. Gautam painted "An Evening in Kilong" (Fig.12), Oil on plywood painting in 1976. This painting is painted when he was serving in Kilong. Artist told that he used to observe sunsets daily and was so fascinated with the changing light on the mountains. In this painting, Artists had depicted the scene of sunset when light falls on the mountains of Ratan Jot (Alkanet), a herbaceous flowering plant of red colour in Kilong region of Himachal Pradesh. Artists employed personal vocabulary to show side faces of a young lady and an old man through the ups and downs of the mountain. The lady is shown on the left and the man on the right, both facing opposite to each other. There is brilliance behind the mountains. This artwork is a soulful creation with something untold and unheard. Perhaps, it seems like the two souls shown with side faces on the mountains want to share something with each other as well as with the viewer. Love in the air is visible by the usage of scarlet, vermilion, and purple. Bold mountains in the foreground seem like protectors of the two. Swaying brush strokes with thick colour are applied. Separate brush strokes of various colours as flake white and yellow sparkling on the edges of the mountain could be seen. An attempt to create a rough texture of the mountain is also visible.



Figure 13, Last Peak of Gujjar Valley, Oil on Plywood, 1972

“Last Peak of Gujjar Valley” (**Fig.13**), is an oil on plywood painting created in 1972. The ethnic beauty of Gujjar valley is infused in this harmonious landscape. A view of a typical rural village of Himachal Pradesh. A well balanced composition with Devdar trees on both the sides of composition and snow clad peak at the background. Perspective is shown very beautifully while drawing as well as with colour. Light coming from the left is clearly visible on the highlights of the peaks at the back, trees and roofs of mud houses. In order to convey subtle atmosphere effects, Gautam refined the technique for blending layers of oil paints. Colour scheme is monochromatic. Application of colour is done using palette knife. Thick patches of colour are clearly visible. Artist’s Approach behind such imaginary landscapes resides in observing the nature by living close to it and paying attention to every single detail created by nature. Only then it is possible to paint such a heart touching landscape. To capture mood of nature is one the most challenging task, for that purpose attention to changing colours according to time is most important.



Figure 14, A winter morning in Dhauladhar, Oil on Plywood, 1975

“A winter morning in Dhauladhar” (*Fig.14*), oil on plywood was painted in 1975. It depicts a perfect winter morning scene. This is a spot painting. Hazy Mountains with sparkling white light on the top and vanishing fog shows the moment when sun is about to rise in few minutes. Artist had perfectly captured the moment. . Pine trees were shown on the left. The colours chosen are quit cool. Monochromatic colour palates with different blues have been used. Deep blue is used to show the depth of Sloppy Mountains. Light and Dark tones have been used in overlapping manner so that they support each other. Attempt to create texture with colour is visible. Artist’s skill of observing and painting on the spot so perfectly is adorable. This is only possible when one is so much into the nature and is accepting whatever nature is offering us. Here, Artist’s only inspiration is Nature.



*Figure 15,
Shashur Gompa, Oil on Plywood, 1876*

Shashur Gompa is located in District Lahaul Spiti, Himachal Pradesh. The painting “Shashur Gompa” (Fig.15) is made on ply wood with oil colours in 1876. Again Monochromatic Colour scheme with burnt sienna, ochre, whites etc. Lively and still quite atmosphere is visible. Gautam believes that an artist had to truly know and understand nature. The best way to achieve that is by living and working in the middle of it. A beautiful effect of light coming in the background and shining bright on the monastery and rocks in the foreground. Snowy peaks are bit hazy in this landscape as compared to other artworks.

III. Techniques: Method and Material

Being a self taught artist, A.R.Gautam learned different techniques of painting by exploring material easily available to him and also which is cost efficient. In the early childhood days he painted over rocks. Then he started sketching with pencil and pen. Latter on moved to watercolours and oil colours. He has experimented with wide range of mediums including Natural pigments, Watercolours, Poster Colours, pastels and oil colours. As Canvas was costly and not easily available he started working on plywood. A unique technique was invented by Gautam. Firstly, a ply wood is coated with white paint and then, saw dust is spread over the surface and let it dry. After the surface is ready, rough sketch is prepared and then colouring with oil paints is done. Use of saw dust provides a unique grain texture to the artworks of A.R.Gautam. Maximum works have been done in this technique. For application of colour Brush and palate knife was used. Colour strokes are thick and patchy. Hazy and misty effect is created by mixing colours so well and smudging them all together in the backgrounds. Highlights on the peaks of mountains is created with the use of flake white and chrome Yellow. Texture plays an important role in his paintings. Most of the works have texture either created by saw dust technique or by usage of thick colour patches. Monochrome colour scheme with knife patches has become his signature style.

IV. Subject Matter

Artists are always inspired from their surroundings. When the reality around us touches our hearts, artists choose to paint it. In the similar way, A.R. Gautam grew up in small village and lived close to nature during his lifetime. Nature is the only inspiration to Gautam. His job postings to different areas of Himachal Pradesh also gave him opportunity to explore and paint the landscapes in his unique visual language. Thus themes are directly taken from the surroundings. His themes revolve around the Landscapes of Himachal Pradesh only. Most loved and repeated elements in his landscapes are stones, trees, waterfall, uprooted trees, Devdar trees and snow melting mountains. Being a native of Mandi, Paintings of particular spots were also made by him when there were no cameras and at present these paintings are rich treasure of heritage as the spots painted are completely changes today because of construction and development over time.

Fig.16 and Fig.17



Fig 16, Gandhi Chowk, Watercolour, 1955

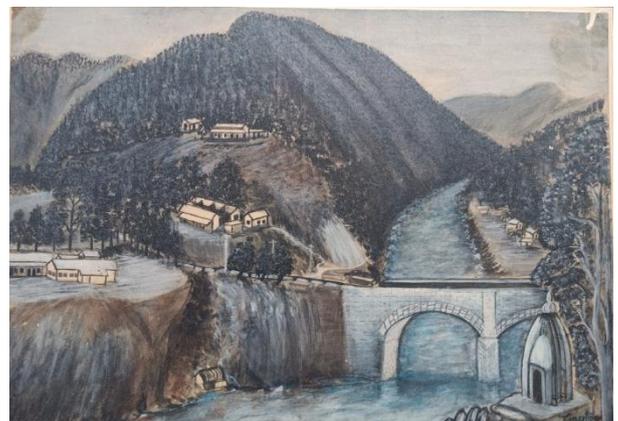


Fig 17, Suketi Bridge, Watercolours, 1955

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can conclude that landscapes by A.R.Gautam are purely soulful. Inclusion of snowy mountains and regional qualities of Himachal Pradesh shows Gautam's commitment to the typical Himalayan Themes. His works are rich treasure of natural beauty of Himachal Pradesh. Spot paintings are an important evidence of land's history. His works could be a great inspiration to the emerging artists who are working on the themes of Landscapes of Himachal Pradesh.

A.R. Gauatm, a person of spiritual nature, enjoys being alone, working and worshipping alone. He believes that God has gifted him with such a great talent that even when he is not painting, painting keeps going in his head. He feels connected with plants and watch clouds, sky and stars for hours. According to him, "Ego is the rival of an artist." He believes that one must live and work rooted to the ground. In addition to painting, A.R. Gautam's uniqueness lies in the various areas of interest he has shown. He has experimented and got expertise in Flute playing through nostrils and was honoured with 'Nad Yog Vibhuti' by Para 85 Research Foundation, Delhi. At present, He is a Life Member of Indian Heritage. During his exhibition in Shivratri Fair, Mandi, his paintings were directed to be preserved as the heritage of Himachal Pradesh by the Hon'ble Chief Minister. Artist lives in Bagla, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh.

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